



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 25, 2017

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Speaker Bates welcomes the head of the New Mexico House of Representatives to the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – Last Thursday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) had the honor of welcoming New Mexico Speaker of the House Brian Egolf (D – Dist. 47) to the capital of the Navajo Nation.

Speaker Bates and Speaker Egolf met for nearly two hours, discussing issues pertaining to the priorities of the Navajo Nation and the upcoming New Mexico State Legislative session that is scheduled to begin in January 2018, in Santa Fe, N.M.

During their discussion, Speaker Bates addressed several issues, including New Mexico's implementation of a high-tech enhancement to the first responder communication network throughout the state through the First Responder Network Authority, also known as FirstNet. The Navajo Nation Council issued its support for FirstNet through resolutions that were sponsored by Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), who has been a strong advocate for the program and recently requested to meet with Gov. Susana Martinez to ensure that the Navajo Nation receives adequate coverage through the state's implementation.

FirstNet was established in 2012 by congress, which is designed to deliver a nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety, to strengthen public safety users' communications capabilities enabling them to respond more quickly and effectively to emergencies.

They also discussed an anticipated bill known as "tax at the rack," which would take the fuel tax liability from the gas distributor and move it to the rack where the distributor fills their tankers, as



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates (right) with New Mexico Speaker of the House Brian Egolf at the Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz. on Oct. 19, 2017.

well as remove the state tax exemption to gas sold at tribal gas stations for the purpose of providing additional funding for the State Road Fund.

Since 1999 after four years of negotiations, New Mexico tribes have been exempt from the state gasoline tax, excluding diesel or special fuels, as long as a tribal tax equal to the state tax is in place. Tax revenues generated from tribal fuel sales have benefitted New Mexico tribes tremendously. If the tribal tax deductions were removed from law this could potentially create a double taxation for gas sold at tribal gas stations, loss of employment if gas stations should close, and loss of tribal revenue.

Speaker Bates also touched on the recent success and progress of the Council's efforts to resolve problems for Navajo elderly people when attempting to obtain a driver's license or identification card that complies with federal standards.

In 2005, Congress passed the Real ID Act that established minimum-security standards for issuing driver's licenses and identification cards. The federal Act, which is enforced by the Department of Homeland Security, requires states to become compliant by October 2020.

As a result of meetings between New Mexico officials and Council members, the state's Motor Vehicle recently announced that their office would begin accepting a Certificate of Indian Blood and affidavit of birth from individuals seeking to obtain a driver's license, identification card, or a driving authorization card.

Speaker Egolf acknowledged that many areas throughout the state have experienced challenges related to implementing the federal standards contained with the federal Real ID Act, and expressed his gratitude to the Council for working with the state to begin resolving the problems.

Prior to the meeting with Speaker Bates, Speaker Egolf and several other members of the state's House of Representatives hosted an event entitled, "Job Creation Listening Tour" in the city of Gallup, which consisted of a roundtable discussion regarding ideas to grow the New Mexico economy and to create job opportunities.

Speaker Bates said he is thankful to Speaker Egolf for his leadership and willingness to work closely with the Navajo Nation. He added that he looks forward to building upon the working relationship between the Nation and the state during the upcoming legislative session.

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